Statement for the Record

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Thank you Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, and members of the
Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here today to address the Office of Emergency
Communications' (OEC's) development of the National Emergency Communications
Plan (NECP) and our other efforts over the past year to improve communications for
emergency response providers and government officials across the Nation.

Before turning to the development of a strategic national plan, we would like to address
Congress' creation of the Office and the important mission that it assigned to OEC. As
we approach the seventh anniversary of the attacks of September 11th, we are constantly
reminded of the need for emergency responders and government officials to
communicate seamlessly to manage incidents and restore essential services in the
aftermath of an incident.

As we have learned through after-action reports and assessments of the Nation's
emergency communications capabilities, there continue to be technological,
organizational, and jurisdictional challenges affecting emergency responders' ability to
communicate effectively during crisis events. This can impact our response and recovery
for large-scale events such as Hurricane Katrina, as well as countless regional and
localized incidents that take place every day.

Ensuring the effectiveness of emergency communications, however, is not something the
Federal government can accomplish on its own: it requires partnering with the tens of

thousands of emergency response providers and coordination across disciplines, jurisdictions, and all levels of government.

Recognizing the challenges associated with emergency communications, Congress established OEC to be the focal point within the Federal government to strengthen and coordinate interoperable emergency communications in collaboration with Federal, State, local, and tribal partners. Further, aware of the need for an overarching strategy to guide National planning and coordination for emergency communications, Congress directed OEC to develop the first NECP and update it periodically, in coordination with stakeholders at all levels of government.

Since becoming operational on April 1, 2007, OEC has been focused on establishing an effective organization to achieve these critical mission requirements. This includes integrating the three interoperability programs transferred from other DHS entities – the Federal wireless programs under the Integrated Wireless Network; the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP); and guidance, tool, and template development by the SAFECOM program. The day-to-day administration of OEC programs and initiatives is being carried out by three branches that report directly to the Director's Office: the Multi-Jurisdictional Communications Services (MCS) Branch, the Federal Communications Services (FCS) Branch, and the Policy, Planning and Analysis Branch.

OEC is working to assess the emergency communications landscape and to identify what is and what is not working; develop plans to reverse deficiencies in emergency responders' communications capabilities; collaborate on initiatives with our Federal, State, and local partners; and work with our partners to implement programs and activities that target gaps and make measurable improvements in emergency communications.

Planning

National Emergency Communications Plan

The National Emergency Communications Plan will serve as a strategic roadmap to help drive measurable improvements in the areas of interoperability, operability, and continuity of communications for emergency responders across the Nation. The Plan seeks to build on the substantial progress that we have made collectively as a Nation and will be the guiding force behind OEC's strategic planning and implementation activities going forward.

As a key first step in developing the NECP, OEC worked to incorporate within the framework of the Plan the requirements under Title XVIII of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-296), as amended by the FY 2007 DHS Appropriations Act. Among the many requirements, the legislation calls for the NECP to include recommendations for expediting the standards process, identifying emergency communications capabilities, and providing short- and long-term solutions, timeframes, and benchmarks for ensuring communications interoperability and operability. Implementing the Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-53) added a requirement for the NECP to

include a date by which our stakeholders expect to achieve a baseline level of interoperability, and OEC worked closely with the emergency response community to address this specific element.

In addition to these legislative directives, OEC analyzed pertinent emergency management documentation and initiatives for possible recommendations and solutions for improving emergency responders' communications capabilities. This included numerous after-action reports, studies, and strategy documents that address communications interoperability and operability issues, such as *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*, *The 9-11 Commission Report*, The National Governors Association 2007 State Homeland Security Directors Survey, and the SAFECOM 2006 National Interoperability Baseline Survey.

Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans

To develop targeted NECP initiatives that build on the findings and recommendations from these key source documents, OEC leveraged its ongoing work in the area of state planning. On December 3, 2007, all 56 States and territories submitted their Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs) in accordance with the requirements of both the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program and the Homeland Security Grant Program. This marked a critical milestone for the Nation. Now, all 56 States and territories have SCIPs that address a common set of requirements and guidelines.

OEC played an important role in the development and approval of the SCIPs, working side by side with state and local communities to provide related guidance and technical assistance. OEC offered assistance in the preparation of these plans to all 56 States and territories and conducted SCIP development workshops for the 30 States and five territories that requested such help. OEC's technical assistance team also supported the development of PSIC Investment Justifications.

Earlier this year, OEC, in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, conducted a preliminary and final review process to evaluate and approve the SCIPs and communicated final feedback and approval decisions to the States and territories in April. The SCIPs provided valuable information about the current interoperability environment within each State and territory. This information was leveraged for the NECP, particularly with respect to current State initiatives to address communications gaps. Moving forward, OEC will work with the States to ensure that future versions of their SCIPs are aligned with the NECP goals and objectives, in part through the grant funding States receive under the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program.

Coordination and Collaboration

Stakeholder involvement was the single most important element in the NECP development process. Title XVIII directs OEC to develop the NECP in cooperation with State, local, and tribal governments; Federal departments and agencies; emergency

response providers; and the private sector. OEC established various working groups to coordinate plan development and ensure that this diverse set of stakeholders provided feedback and input at each step of the NECP process. These stakeholder forums will be critical in the implementation of the NECP and all areas of OEC's mission going forward.

- **SAFECOM Executive Committee (EC)/Emergency Response Council (ERC)** – The SAFECOM EC and ERC, managed jointly by OEC and the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility within DHS' Science and Technology Directorate, are composed of emergency responders at every level of government. The SAFECOM EC provides strategic recommendations on emergency responder needs from the practitioner and policymaker perspective at all levels of government. The SAFECOM ERC serves as a vehicle to collect a broad base of public safety community input on emergency responder user needs and participates in project action teams to develop work products and identify user needs. The EC/ERC were the primary mechanisms for coordinating State and local feedback on the NECP; they formed an NECP Work Group that included more than 40 first responders, elected officials, and public safety communication officials from around the Nation, as well as representatives from some Federal agencies.

- **Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC)** – Title XVIII directs the ECPC to serve as the focal point and clearinghouse for intergovernmental information on interoperable emergency communications and coordinate Federal input to the Plan. To facilitate Federal participation in the NECP process, the ECPC formed a Focus Group comprising representatives from numerous DHS agencies as well as the Department of Defense, Department of Justice, Department of Commerce, Department of Treasury, Department of the Interior, the Federal Communications Commission, the National Guard, and others.

- **Critical Infrastructure Partnership Advisory Council (CIPAC)** – The CIPAC, developed by DHS, is a key partnership between government and critical infrastructure/key resource owners and operators; it provides a forum for stakeholders to engage in a broad spectrum of activities. OEC worked within the CIPAC structure to facilitate NECP discussions through a cross-sector working group that included private sector representatives from the communications, information technology, and emergency services sectors, as well as State, local, territorial, and tribal government officials.

- **Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC) –** The FPIC is a voluntary organization of Federal, State, local, and tribal emergency communications users, managers, and planners that serves as a forum to build partnerships and collaboratively address policy and technical challenges related to spectrum, standards and technology, and security. Through the FPIC, DHS and other Federal departments and agencies are engaged in resource sharing initiatives with State and local agencies across the Nation.

- **NECP Federal, State, Local Focus Group** – To facilitate cross-governmental discussions and perspectives about the Plan, OEC organized a focus group consisting of Federal, State, and local representatives with significant experience in public safety communications and emergency response activities.

OEC worked closely with each of these stakeholder groups to develop the core strategic elements of the NECP, including the overall vision for the Plan, which calls for emergency response personnel at all levels of government, and across disciplines, to communicate as needed, on demand, and as authorized. To help us realize that vision, the Plan provides goals, objectives, and initiatives for improving emergency communications capabilities at the Federal, State, and local levels. The Plan reflects the fact that there is no simple solution for solving emergency communications challenges. In addition to technology, we must also focus on improvements in governance and coordination, planning, usage, and training and exercises.

Implementation – Policy/Guidance/Assistance

The NECP will serve as the first national strategy to guide decision-making and better integrate Federal, State, local, and private sector emergency communications efforts. It will be a living document subject to periodic review and updates by OEC, in coordination with its stakeholders. Although implementation of the NECP will be a shared responsibility among all levels of government, OEC will be the lead Federal entity for managing the Plan, working closely with our partners to meet milestones and achieve stated goals. In this role, OEC will monitor achievement of the NECP's recommended milestones and initiatives and will coordinate with our stakeholders to assess progress in reaching the Plan's goals.

OEC will help drive NECP implementation through the provision of targeted technical assistance to State, regional, local, territorial, and tribal government officials; the development of grant guidance that aligns with NECP priorities; and the coordination of Federal NECP activities through the ECPC and FPIC. OEC will manage overall implementation of the NECP, but, for this to be a successful Plan, the emergency response community must take ownership of the proposed initiatives and actions, and dedicate itself to meeting the key benchmarks. We cannot achieve the NECP's goals without the support and commitment of the Federal, State, and local communities that helped craft the Plan and that play such an important role in the implementation.

As previously stated, the NECP will be the strategic driving force behind everything OEC does as an organization. It will help integrate emergency communications efforts at the Federal, regional, State, and local levels, and it will better align national resources and initiatives under a common strategy. This includes OEC's technical assistance and grant guidance work.

Grants
OEC is responsible for developing and coordinating grant guidance for all departmental grant programs funding interoperable communications. In addition, OEC will work with other Federal agencies to maximize the allocation and expenditures of emergency-response, communications-related grant dollars across the Federal government. OEC's annual SAFECOM Recommended Federal Interoperable Communications Grant Guidance outlines recommendations for grant funding eligibility, including applicants and activities, application criteria, guidelines, and resources, to help Federal grant

programs use their funds to strengthen interoperability within the emergency response community.

In addition, OEC has been working to implement Section 1809 of the Homeland Security Act, which established the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) to "improve local, tribal, statewide, regional, national and, where appropriate, international interoperable emergency communications." OEC has worked in partnership with the FEMA Grant Programs Directorate to execute the IECGP, for which $50 million was appropriated in FY 2008. OEC has focused on ensuring that the IECGP is consistent with the priorities and initiatives of the NECP and the SCIPs. Grant guidance for this program was released in June.

Under the IECGP, States are required to report to OEC annually on their progress in implementing their SCIPs, and OEC must annually submit a report on grant allocation and any progress in implementing SCIPs and improving interoperability. These reporting requirements will enable OEC to measure the progress of States and territories in implementing their SCIPs and assess nationwide progress in achieving the goals and objectives set forth in the NECP.

Technical Assistance

Another important element of OEC's mission is the provision of technical assistance to State, local, tribal, and territorial governments through the ICTAP. OEC's MCS Branch leads our technical assistance efforts and supports requests for a range of interoperability issues, including engineering, governance, training, regional planning, and the Web-based Communication Assets Survey and Mapping (CASM) tool funded through ICTAP. Since the NECP attempts to resolve many of these same issues, OEC's technical assistance programs will pursue a more strategic approach for addressing gaps and improving capabilities.

Over the last year, OEC has supported numerous requests for technical assistance, including engineering-related issues on radio channel planning and use, interoperability needs assessments, and the integration of voice and data technologies. We helped Urban Areas address gaps in governance and standard operating procedures (SOPs) identified during the 2006 Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP) process and helped States develop their Regional TICPs. OEC also established an agreement with FEMA to provide gateway training for emergency response personnel participating in the Commercial Equipment Direct Assistance Program Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Further, OEC offers ongoing assistance through CASM, which collects and displays interoperable communications information to improve emergency responders' communications planning. In 2007, OEC enhanced the tool's functionality, and CASM was used by stakeholders throughout the country. At the end of 2007, CASM contained information on 60 States and Urban Areas, and there are currently more than 1,100 CASM user accounts.

Historically, technical assistance programs have successfully enhanced emergency communications capabilities jurisdiction by jurisdiction, in response to requests from individual agencies. Going forward, OEC will develop targeted technical assistance offerings that align with gaps in the current capabilities and initiatives identified in the NECP.

The development and implementation of the NECP depends on OEC's successful relationship with our stakeholders under the SAFECOM program. SAFECOM brings Federal, State, and local stakeholders together to improve interoperability by developing tools, best practices, and methodologies for emergency response agencies. SAFECOM is an important resource for achieving the vision and advancing the goals and objectives of the NECP.

OEC and its SAFECOM stakeholders are currently developing two key tools that will foster NECP implementation and address gaps identified in SCIPs: *The Governance Sustainability and Strategic Planning Implementation Methodology*, which provides guidance and lessons learned in creating and sustaining an effective Statewide communications interoperability governance structure through SCIP implementation, and *The Capabilities Assessment Guide*, which will help practitioners develop and execute a capabilities assessment for communications interoperability. The guide will also demonstrate numerous ways for users to inventory interoperability assets, including the application of CASM, in their overall assessment process.

Cross Border Interoperability Initiatives

Cross border interoperability is critical in enabling emergency response providers to coordinate and mitigate threats posed by criminal activity such as drug and human trafficking and terrorism. Through the FCS Branch, OEC is leading several initiatives in support of the NECP that improve cross border communications interoperability among domestic (e.g., Federal, State, local, and tribal agencies) and international partners (e.g., Canada and Mexico), including:

- **2010 Olympics/Northwest Expansion Project** – OEC is supporting the 2010 Olympics Security Committee Communications Interoperability Working Group in its efforts to ensure effective interoperability during the Olympic and Paralympics Games, including coordinating the development of an Integrated Interoperable Communications Plan and related training and exercises for all applicable Federal, State, local, tribal, and non-governmental organization emergency response providers.
- **US-Mexico High-Level Consultative Commission on Telecommunications (HLCC)** – OEC is leading the HLCC Security Communications Task Group's development and implementation of a long-term solution to improve communications among emergency response providers on both sides of the border to combat border violence and improve public safety.

Measurements and Reporting

OEC's current levers and incentives for driving NECP implementation include the provision of technical assistance to State, regional, local, and tribal government officials; the development of grant guidance and programs (such as the IECGP); and the coordination of Federal emergency communications activities through the ECPC and FPIC. In addition, Title XVIII directs OEC and its Federal partners to submit to Congress a number of periodic assessments and reports concerning progress made in improving emergency communications nationwide.

One such report is OEC's Biennial Progress Report, which presents an assessment of operable and interoperable emergency communications capabilities across all levels of government. DHS submitted OEC's first Progress Report to Congress earlier this year. In addition, DHS submitted the first phase of OEC's National Communications Capabilities Report (NCCR) to Congress in April. This phase of the NCCR evaluates emergency communications capabilities, provides an understanding of emergency response capabilities needed, and summarizes Federal and State interoperable frequencies and public safety systems and equipment currently in use.

The NCCR indicates that Federal, State, local, and tribal governments currently have varying levels of available capabilities to address emergency communications needs and that additional work is needed to formalize and broaden governance structures, standardize interagency SOPs and agreements across regions and surrounding States, manage communications assets, increase backup capabilities, and improve training programs and exercises. OEC used NCCR data to develop the NECP, including a baseline for measuring interoperability and operability assurance capabilities.

OEC will leverage other Title XVIII reports and assessments to monitor progress in achieving NECP goals and objectives, including the annual progress reports under the IECGP, the Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Work Group annual reports, and the ECPC annual strategic assessment.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and the Committee, thank you for your continued support for such a vital part of the overall homeland security mission. OEC is committed to achieving a unified vision for the Nation, one that enables emergency responders to communicate as needed, on demand, and as authorized, at all levels of government and across all disciplines. We are extremely proud of the efforts the Office has made over the past year to meet this challenge, improve interoperable communications for the emergency response community, and ensure the sustainability of communications in an all-hazards context.

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.